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WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACT, S.1021, APPROVED TO BUILD SUPPLY OF SKILLED WORKERS, MEET EMPLOYER DEMANDS

Washington, D.C. - U.S. Senator Mike Enzi, R-WY, Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (HELP Committee), today announced the passage of the "Workforce Investment Act Amendments of 2005," S.1021, a bill that will give states the flexibility to provide training for jobs in high-skill, high-wage, and high-demand occupations, and the approval of the President's nomination of Raymond Simon to be the Deputy Secretary of Education.

The Committee approved both measures today, clearing the way for consideration by the full Senate. Senator Ted Kennedy (D-MA), Ranking Member of the HELP Committee, co-sponsored S.1021, which Enzi said is the product of a bipartisan process that began in the 108th Congress.

"We are facing an economic challenge that threatens our ability as a nation to compete in the global economy," Enzi said, commenting on S.1021. "This bill provides the important resources that are needed to prepare our workforce with the skills necessary for jobs and careers in high-wage and high-skilled occupations."

"The skill and literacy requirements of today's workplace cannot be met if we do not provide everyone access to lifelong education, training, and retraining," he added.

Enzi praised the nomination of Simon, currently the Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education, saying: "I fully support this nomination and look forward to moving it quickly through the Senate. Raymond Simon's experience running a state school system makes him incomparably qualified to be the Deputy Secretary of Education, one of the top leaders of our nation's federal education agenda."

Combined with the "Perkins Career and Technical Education Act," which the Senate passed in March, and the "Higher Education Act," which Enzi said the HELP Committee will consider in the next few months, S 1021 will provide important resources that are needed to adequately prepare the nation's workforce.

The "Workforce Investment Act Amendments of 2005" includes provisions to:

- Improve existing the One-Stop Career Center delivery system to ensure that it can respond quickly and effectively to the changing needs of employers and workers in the new economy and can address the needs of special populations, including individuals with disabilities;
- Strengthen connections of the job training system with the private sector, including post-secondary education and training, social services and economic development

systems, to prepare the 21st Century's workers for career opportunities and skills in high growth sectors;

- Improve access to services in all areas, including rural areas;
- Increase the emphasis on ensuring that individuals with disabilities have physical and programmatic access to workforce activities at one-stop centers and approved training providers;
- Expand services to the business sector to make the system more demand-driven and responsive to employers' needs, including small employers;
- Improve youth job training activities by directing more resources to those out-of-school youth who are most in need of assistance;
- Enhance assistance to youth between from 16 to 21 years of age, which face barriers to employment.